

## ON HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATION OF THE WILL TO POWER AS ART

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The general purpose of my essay is to demonstrate that at the initial stage of his long debate with Nietzsche, i.e., in his 1936 lecture course on *The Will to Power as Art*, Heidegger was convinced that his own philosophical project of fundamental ontology brought out the genuine foundation of Nietzsche's thought. A more specific purpose included in the general perspective is to suggest that, by the same token, Heidegger's essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art* was conceived as an attempt to revive Nietzsche's notion of art.

As far as the general purpose is concerned, it could immediately be objected that, if fundamental ontology claims to lay bare the genuine foundation of Nietzsche's thought, then some presence of Nietzsche's legacy ought to be in evidence in Heidegger's earlier works. But — so goes the objection — there is no indication in Heidegger of an explicit debate with Nietzsche either in the lecture courses which paved the way to *Being and Time* or in the book itself and the lecture courses and papers delivered by him directly after its publication.

This is what I reply to the objection. True, in all those writings Heidegger's discussion or deconstruction [*Destruktion*] of the history of metaphysics, considered in its obvious forefront, bears upon Plato and Aristotle, on Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Husserl, but not on Nietzsche. However, this does not at all preclude the presence of a real though often tacit debate with Nietzsche in the background of these same writings. Indeed as early as 1925, in the lecture course on the *Prolegomena to the History of the Concept of Time*, we find an extremely significant hint in this regard. Immediately after insisting that authentic phenomenology ought to fight "against any inclination to provide guidelines for life,"<sup>1</sup> Heidegger writes: "Philosophical research is and remains atheism, which is why philosophy can allow itself 'the arrogance of thinking.' Not only will it allow itself as much; this arrogance is the inner necessity of philosophy and its true strength. Precisely in this atheism philosophy becomes what a great man once called the 'joyful science.'"<sup>2</sup> It is in continuity with this proclamation of affinity with Nietzsche that *Being and Time* in its second division (section 53) punctuates

without the slightest reservation its analysis of the “existential projection of an authentic Being-towards-death” with a quotation of Zarathustra’s speech “on free death.”<sup>3</sup> The same affinity leaks out in section 76 when Heidegger, dealing with “the existential source of historiology in *Dasein*’s historicity,” claims that Nietzsche’s second *Untimely Meditation* not only shows that he “recognized what was essential to the ‘use and abuse of historiology for life,’” but also that he “understood more” than he made public.<sup>4</sup> All this indicates that the acknowledgment of a kinship with Nietzsche had early and deep roots in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology.

As far as the more specific purpose of my presentation is concerned, it could likewise be objected that art is in no way a major topic in the writings which gravitated around *Being and Time*, and consequently that Heidegger’s celebration of creative activity in the years 1933 and following, for instance in the first lecture course on Hölderlin and in the course of *Introduction to Metaphysics*, is not at all anticipated in the early version of fundamental ontology. To this objection here it is perhaps sufficient to reply with two remarks. First, although it is true that in the early version of fundamental ontology no particular attention is paid to the works of the artists, there is nevertheless at least one topic in Heidegger’s reappropriation of the Greeks at that time which paves the way to further developments. In his interpretation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1924 in terms of the earliest ontology of *Dasein*, Heidegger deals extensively with the Greek understanding of art: *technē* — a word which in Aristotle, and in Plato before him, designates the know-how which presides over the production of either works by artisans and artists or of results by experts. What Heidegger finds with admiration in Aristotle is this: art is a dianoietic virtue or excellence of which human *Dasein* is capable, and it owes that excellence to its disclosing character. Art is an active mode of *aletheuein*, of disclosing beings; it is a capacity to put *aletheia* into work. To be sure, in order for the later meditation on the work of art, say in 1935, to grant this happening of truth in art, thus already discovered in 1924, an eminently ontological status, Heidegger in the meantime had to introduce a clear distinction between, on the one hand, a petty *technē* coupled with a petty *poiesis* narrowly tied to everydayness and doomed to fall away from authenticity, and on the other hand, a great art taken as an eminent knowledge coupled with a fully creative production capable of the most authentic unconcealment. This distinction is lacking in the early analytic of *Dasein*, which seems to reduce the entire realm of *technē*, i.e., the technical know-how of the artisan or expert, as well as the art of the artist, to the level of practical circumspection enmeshed in everydayness. Such a distinction will emerge forcefully in the

sadly famous Rectoral Address of 1933. But — and this is my second remark — it is already outlined in the lecture course of the Winter semester of 1931-32 on *The Essence of Truth*,<sup>5</sup> which interprets Plato's parable of the cave in the framework of fundamental ontology. The lecture course claims that the steps of Plato's narrative are developments in the advent of truth culminating in "the authentic liberation of man in consideration of the original light of Being." That liberation is presented by Heidegger as a "projection of Being" [*Seinsentwurf*].<sup>6</sup> In this context Heidegger claims, for the first time I believe, that art, more specifically poetry, plays a decisive role in such a liberation. The artist, he says,

has an essential insight into the possible, he brings into the work the hidden possibilities of what is and thereby allows men to see for the first time the actual being wherein they blindly bustle about. What is essential in the discovery of the real [*Wirklichen*] did not happen thanks to the sciences but rather thanks to philosophy in what originally belongs to it and thanks to great poetry and its projects. Poetry renders being more being.<sup>7</sup>

But Heidegger insists that in order to understand this, it is necessary "to stop regarding the problem of art as a problem of aesthetics."<sup>8</sup>

Enough for my replies to such preliminary objections. Let us now turn to Heidegger's lecture course on *The Will to Power as Art*.

Let me note immediately that Heidegger's investigation proceeds in two movements. In the first stage, the focus is on the will to power as such. In the second stage, the focus is placed on art considered as the most transparent mode of the will to power. I would like to show that in the first stage, Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's notion of the will to power with the help of the *constructive* elements of his fundamental ontology, whereas in the second stage, he approaches art in historical terms on the ground of his own *deconstructive* interpretation of the history of metaphysics, a deconstructive undertaking that is also an essential element of his fundamental ontology.

Before beginning to trace these two stages, it may be noted that the way Heidegger depicts the peculiar style of his reading of Nietzsche, at the outset of the lecture course, already reveals that his own philosophical project as a fundamental ontologist is at stake in his debate with Nietzsche. After recalling that the fragments posthumously collected under the title *The Will to Power* not only show that Nietzsche had a high idea of philosophy but also that his thought was moving in the orbit of the guiding question [*Leit-frage*] of Western philosophy, i.e., the question: "what is being?," Heidegger claims that there is a deeper question, a grounding question [*Grundfrage*],

which did not unfold as such in the history of philosophy. That deeper question is, of course, the question concerning the meaning of Being. This could give the impression that Heidegger's intention in the lecture course is to underscore a distance, a demarcation between himself and Nietzsche. This impression is reinforced by the fact that Heidegger uses the word *Auseinandersetzung* to characterize his relation to Nietzsche. Indeed this term can designate a confrontation in the sense of a clearcut contrast between two positions. But it can also have the connotation of the pursuit of an understanding, of an agreement through a debate. This second connotation is evidently included in Heidegger's definition of what he means here by *Auseinandersetzung*: "Confrontation . . . is the supreme way, the only way, to a true estimation of a thinker. In confrontation we undertake to reflect on his thinking and to trace it in its effective force, not in its weakness. To what purpose? In order that through the confrontation we ourselves may become free for the supreme exertion of thinking."<sup>9</sup> What is aimed at in this effort to trace Nietzsche's thought in its effective force is obviously the discovery of a kinship. A profound kinship indeed, for how could the confrontation liberate the supreme effort of thinking, if it were unable to detect in Nietzsche, beyond what remains in the orbit of the guiding question, a genuine openness to the grounding question? The strategy of Heidegger's lecture course on *The Will to Power as Art* is to situate the thinking endeavor of Nietzsche in the interval between the two questions. It is in that sense that he can claim that "the error (of common judgments about Nietzsche) will be recognized only when a confrontation with him is at the same time conjoined to a confrontation in the realm of the grounding question of philosophy."<sup>10</sup> More specifically said, it is in that sense that Heidegger can claim that what is at stake in Nietzsche's effort to come to terms with the inner unity of the will to power, the eternal return, and the historical reevaluation, now, of all the previous values is also what was at stake in the theoretical project articulated in *Being and Time*. This is what he expresses in section four of the lecture course. After stating that the will to power is Nietzsche's answer to the guiding question of Western philosophy, and after insisting that this question is only preliminary because the decisive question is the grounding question of the meaning of Being, Heidegger makes it clear that Nietzsche's most difficult thought goes beyond the guiding question and addresses the grounding one by asking "what is will to power itself, and how is it?" and replying: the eternal return of the same. Allow me to quote:

when he thinks "the most difficult thought" at the "peak of the meditation," Nietzsche thinks and meditates on Being, that is, on will to power as eternal recurrence. What does that mean, taken

quite broadly and essentially? Eternity, not as a static “now,” nor as a sequence of “nows” rolling off into the infinite, but as the “now” that bends back into itself: what is it if not the concealed essence of time? Thinking Being, will to power, as eternal return, thinking the most difficult thought of philosophy, means thinking Being as Time.<sup>11</sup>

Hence Heidegger's design in the lecture course is to draw Nietzsche's questioning into the perspective of the question that the book entitled *Being and Time* was attempting to address. Which of course means correspondingly that the design of the course is also to bring the questions he raises in the same book from 1927 within the perspective of Nietzsche's questioning. Thus in all respects, the hermeneutic principle of the investigation indicates a strong connivance within the confrontation [*Ausein-andersetzung*].

Let me try to find confirmation of this connivance in the steps of the investigation which focuses on the third book of the posthumous work entitled *The Will to Power*, more specifically on the fourth division of the third book, a division entitled “The Will to Power as Art.” Heidegger's debate with Nietzsche in his investigation proceeds in two stages: 1) a preliminary elucidation of the will to power as such; 2) an elucidation of art as an eminent modality of the will to power.

## I

Right at the outset of the first stage, Heidegger once again stresses that the thematic unity of will to power, eternal return, and transvaluation is for him in no way simply a topic for scholarship. On the contrary, such unity draws the actual coordinates of his own metaphysical task at that moment.

The connivance involved in this becomes conspicuous in Heidegger's general remarks about the will to power as such. For example, to the question why it is not surprising to define the basic character of beings as will to power, Heidegger answers that such conception “is very much in line with the best and greatest tradition of German philosophy,” i.e., the tradition of German idealism, illustrated by Schelling and Hegel, and prepared by the work of Leibniz. This is no small compliment considering, firstly, that in the previous summer of 1936 Heidegger had delivered a lecture course on the treatise *On the Essence of Human Freedom* in which he highlighted many signs of proximity between Schelling's thought and his own fundamental ontology; considering secondly, that in 1930-31 he had delivered a course on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which, incidentally, he defined as an

*Auseinandersetzung* his own effort to demonstrate that Hegel's book approached in its way the true core of fundamental ontology because, in opposition to the taken for granted notion of Being as presence-at-hand, the Hegelian description was already moving "in the very space of transcendence itself."<sup>12</sup> Hence when Nietzsche claims that the will is the basic character of beings, Nietzsche simply evinces that he is a great among the greatest.

The connivance is even more striking in Heidegger's elucidation of the meaning of the expression "will to power" in Nietzsche's own text. Indeed the elucidation proceeds in full compliance with the basic phenomenological maxims of Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein*. He insists that the point is to "see" willing as something of which we already have an intimate experience. He also stresses that what is to be seen is not a fact but an "essence." And finally he insists that the clarification of such an essence cannot appeal to a particular being — for example, the soul, or the body, or the mind, or some type of faculty or causality — since the will is nothing ontic but rather the fundamental character of all beings. In the light of those precepts — return to the Self, insight into essences, phenomenology as ontology — Heidegger does not hesitate to express the meaning of the will to power in the very language of the analytic of *Dasein*. Contrasting Nietzsche's notion with Schopenhauer's conception of "a willing that becomes purer as what is willed is left more and more indeterminate and the one who wills left more and more decisively out of the picture,"<sup>13</sup> he defines willing as "resoluteness toward oneself, but as the one who wills what is posited in the willing as willed,"<sup>14</sup> in such a manner that Schopenhauer's notion of a "willing in general" no longer makes sense. Heidegger insists that the resoluteness toward oneself is determinate whereas the mere striving which characterizes "willing in general" remains indeterminate with respect to both the willed and the willing. This very contrast is, of course, an echo of the contrast underscored in the analytic of *Dasein*, that is, the tension between the everyday absorption in the They and in exterior entities, and authentic transcendence. Accordingly, Heidegger does not shy from formulating the opposition striving-willing in the terminology of his own existential analytic: "In mere striving after something we are not properly [*eigentlich*] brought before ourselves; rather, we merely strive, and get wholly absorbed in such striving. By way of contrast, will, as resolute openness to oneself, is always a willing beyond oneself."<sup>15</sup> Finally, it is the analytic of *Dasein* which enables Heidegger to elucidate Nietzsche's notion of mastery: "In such decisiveness of willing, which reaches out beyond itself, lies mastery over..., having power over what is revealed in the willing and in what is held fast in the grips of resoluteness."<sup>16</sup>

In a further refining of the elucidation, the appeal to the phenomenological method of the analytic of *Dasein* is again what provides the hermeneutic framework for Heidegger's effort to justify the use by Nietzsche of apparently psychologistic designations of the will, such as affect, passion, feeling. Those designations, he claims, are in no way merely psychological. They point to essential moments in *Dasein's* constitution. For example, we can realize that Nietzsche is right to designate the will as an affect, as soon as we pay attention to the fact that two essential moments of any affect, i.e., "to be lifted beyond ourselves," and "to be seized by" are included as well in the essence of resoluteness as transcendence and as a condition within the scope of which we always are. Likewise, we may say that Nietzsche is right to designate the will as a passion if we admit that the essential moment of passion — a peculiar lucidity or perspicacity [*Hellsichtigkeit*] — is also part of the essence of resoluteness: it allows us "to take hold of ourselves and achieve lucid mastery over what is around us and within us."<sup>17</sup> Also we can approve Nietzsche when he "does not shy from conceiving willing simply as feeling," provided that we understand that this definition "refers to something altogether proper to the essence of will,"<sup>18</sup> that is, to the essence of *Entschlossenheit*. Indeed, resoluteness, while bringing the Self to itself, consists in finding oneself beyond oneself [*sich befinden*] in a specific "state of attunement" [*Gestimmtheit*].

Accordingly, Heidegger discards as superficial and extrinsic the customary interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of the will as "emotional," which is to say the usual attempt to distinguish his supposedly emotional notion from the so called "idealistic" one. The question is: what do people mean when they claim that the idealistic conception of the will has nothing to do with Nietzsche's? Heidegger's answer is unambiguous:

If by an "idealistic interpretation of the will" we understand every conception that in any way emphasizes representation, thought, knowledge, and concept as essential components of will, then Aristotle's interpretation of will is undoubtedly idealistic. So in the same way are those of Leibniz and Kant; but then so too is that of Nietzsche.<sup>19</sup>

On this point, Heidegger once again stresses the continuity of Nietzsche's emphasis on the essential role of knowledge in the will with the interpretation of will as identical to knowledge in German Idealism. Attempting to dispose of a customary interpretation of Nietzsche in the light of Darwinism, Heidegger underscores a similar continuity when he opposes the notion of self-preservation to self-affirmation. The former, he says, "merely clings to what is already at hand, stubbornly insists upon it, loses

itself in it, and so becomes blind to its own essence,”<sup>20</sup> whereas the latter “is always a going back into the essence, into the origin,” that is, into the Being and essence of beings. Such self-affirmation [*Selbstbeauptung*] is what Heidegger discovers at the center of Nietzsche’s notion of willing as a willing to be more power, as “enhancement,” as “increase in power,” hence as “something creative,” and therefore, destructive as well. Since willing is taken to be the Being of beings, this destructiveness means that “to the essence of Being nullity belongs, not as a sheer vacuous nothingness, but as the empowering no.”<sup>21</sup> The same notion of Being, Heidegger insists, is at the core of “the monstrous power of the negative” celebrated by Hegel in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This gives him the opportunity to recall that Nietzsche sensed that a “grandiose initiative” of metaphysical thought was at work in German Idealism.

In all respects, the hermeneutic procedure of Heidegger’s elucidation of the will to power is thus a multiplication of signs of connivance. Among these signs the most striking is perhaps the claim that, by interpreting Being as will to power, Nietzsche was able to rediscover and revive, though unknowingly, the core of the Aristotelian doctrine, such as it is exposed in “the most question-worthy” of all the books of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, that is, Book Theta, which demonstrates the unity of *energeia* and *entelecheia*, taken as “the highest determinations of Being.”<sup>22</sup> It is extremely significant in this regard, I believe, that a few years before, Heidegger, lecturing on Book Theta, had explained the deep intention of his lecture course with the help of an aphorism of *The Will to Power*:

A few centuries hence, perhaps, one will judge that all German philosophy derives its real dignity from being a gradual reclamation of the soil of antiquity, and that all claims to originality must sound petty and ludicrous in relation to the higher claim of the Germans to have joined anew the bond that seemed to be broken, the bond with the Greeks, the hitherto highest type of man.“ (WP 419)

What Heidegger, in the lecture course of 1936, calls “the innermost historicity of Nietzschean thought,” consists precisely in joining anew that bond, a task that Heidegger makes his own, and in the horizon of which he is here questioning.

## II

It is now time to examine the second stage: the elucidation of art as an eminent mode of the will to power. Why is it necessary for an interpretation



of “the nucleus of the will to power” to begin precisely here, with art? Before addressing the issue, Heidegger recalls once again that the basic philosophical perspective of his interpretation is not simply to ask the guiding question of philosophy, but to ask the grounding question about the meaning of Being, which was never raised explicitly even by Nietzsche. This is why he insists that in his interrogation, “the opening up of beings as a whole and of Being is the target of thought.” In other words, “beings are to be brought in the open region of Being itself and Being is to be brought into the open region of its essence. The openness of beings,” Heidegger says, “we call unconcealment — *aletheia*, truth. The guiding and the grounding questions of philosophy ask what beings and Being in truth are.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently if the will to power is Nietzsche’s own answer to the guiding question, this answer is supposed to determine beings in their truth. And if art is an eminent mode of the will to power, then the question of truth must play a decisive role in the elucidation of Nietzsche’s conception of art. But if it is the case, as I have already suggested, that Nietzsche grazes the grounding question of the meaning of Being, at least implicitly, then it is to be supposed as well that Heidegger’s investigation also aims at discovering in Nietzsche a decisive path towards the truth of Being itself.

The elucidation of Nietzsche’s conception of art in terms of the will to power starts with a summary of Nietzsche’s teaching about the essence of art, with the help of five statements. Let me recall them.

- 1) Art is the most perspicuous and familiar configuration of the will to power.
- 2) Art must be grasped in terms of the artist.
- 3) According to the expanded concept of the artist, art is the basic occurrence of all beings; to the extent that they are, beings are self-creating, created.
- 4) Art is the distinctive countermovement to nihilism.
- 5) Art is worth more than “the truth.”<sup>24</sup>

As I suggested in my preliminary remarks, in this second step of the investigation, Heidegger proceeds upon the background of his own deconstructive understanding of the history of metaphysics. A few significant elements of that deconstruction shine forth in his comments on the five summarizing statements. Such a significant element is “the overcoming of aesthetics.” Indeed, Heidegger insists that “what is decisive in Nietzsche’s conception of art [is] that he sees it in its essential entirety in terms of the artist; this he does consciously, and in explicit opposition to that conception of art which represents it in terms of those who ‘enjoy’ and ‘experience’

[*Erlebenden*] it.”<sup>25</sup> Another deconstructive element, linked to the over-coming of aesthetics, is the conception of art as a properly metaphysical activity. From which derives as an additional element, the deconstruction of the two-worlds metaphysics, which, after Plato, but in appealing to him, opposes the supersensuous world to the sensuous one, or “the truth” to mere semblance. Accordingly, the emphasis on a link between the question of truth and the question of art also includes, as an essential connotation, the deconstruction of the traditional notion of truth. Here again the connivance is striking. Quoting Nietzsche’s well-known statement, Heidegger writes: “*The Birth of Tragedy* believes in art on the background of another belief — that it is not possible to live with truth, that the ‘will to truth’ is already a symptom of degeneration” and immediately appends the following: “The statement sounds perverse. But it loses its foreignness, though not its importance, as soon as we read it in the right way. ‘Will to truth’ here (and with Nietzsche, always) means the will to supersensuousness, to being in itself. The will to such ‘true beings’ is *in truth* a no-saying to our present world, precisely the one in which art is at home.”<sup>26</sup>

As I said above, Heidegger’s elucidation of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power finds its resort in Heidegger’s own fundamental ontology, specifically, the analytic of *Dasein*. Both strictly comply with the phenomenological rule of bracketing the scientific positivities as well as the pseudo-philosophies inspired by the sciences. On the other hand, I have recalled that as early as 1931, Heidegger was claiming that it is necessary to stop considering the problem of art as a problem of aesthetics. Now it is well known that *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in line with such a claim, exhibits an attempt to pull art out of the orbit of aesthetics. Thus, in order for the second purpose of my presentation — i.e., suggesting that that essay was conceived as an attempt to revive Nietzsche’s notion of art — to win some degree of plausibility, one should be able to demonstrate at least that Heidegger’s elucidation of the will to power as art intends to clear Nietzsche of all suspicion of psychologism and aestheticism in artistic matters.

I shall limit my presentation to a few hints in that direction.

Heidegger concedes that “Nietzsche’s meditation on art keeps to the traditional path”<sup>27</sup> of aesthetics, but he immediately warns that “Nietzsche’s interrogation of art becomes aesthetics driven to the extreme, an aesthetics, so as to overturn or reverse itself [*sich selbst überschlagt*].” In order to exhibit this reversal, a reflection on the essence of aesthetics is necessary: “Because what stands in question for us is art as a configuration of the will to power, which is to say as a configuration of Being altogether, indeed the distinctive one, the question of aesthetics as the basic sort of meditation on art and the

knowledge of it can be treated only with respect to fundamentals.”<sup>28</sup> Such reflection on the essence of aesthetics includes a reflection on “the role of aesthetics in Western thought, and its relation to the history of Western art.”<sup>29</sup> Once again the perspective of such reflection is a deconstructive one, that is to say in Heidegger’s own words: “a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are deconstructed down to the sources from which they were drawn,” a process thanks to which “ontology can fully assure itself in a phenomenological way of the genuine character of its concepts.”<sup>30</sup> Such deconstruction is essentially historical for it cannot be carried out without a historical recursion to the tradition.

As a result of a long historical development, we now approach art in terms of aesthetics, that is, in terms of an investigation whose subject-matter is artistic Beauty considered in its relation to man’s state of feeling. Heidegger claims that though the name only appears in the eighteenth century to designate a specific field of inquiry, it is no exaggeration to say that such investigation “on the basis of feeling in enjoyers and producers” goes back to the beginning of Western thought.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the deconstruction here is invited to pay attention to the propaedeutics of aesthetics in Greek philosophy and to point out a few “basic facts” [*Grundtatsachen*] in the history of both aesthetics and the Western art.

First fact. The “great art” of the Greeks — “great art” is a key notion in *The Origin of the Work of Art* — remained at the time of its blossoming without a corresponding “thoughtful and conceptual reflection” about it. Which simply means that the temples, the statues as well as the tragedies created in Athens in the fifth century B.C. did not at the time generate a philosophy of art. This does not mean however that the “great art” was only triggering “lived experiences,” for “it was their good fortune that the Greeks had no ‘lived experience’ but an original and luminous knowledge” and therefore did not need an aesthetics.<sup>32</sup>

Second fact. “Aesthetics begins with the Greeks only at the moment when their great art and also the great philosophy that flourished along with it come to an end.” Hence the “original and luminous knowledge” mentioned in connection with the first fact includes presocratic thought, or, in Nietzsche’s words, “philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks.” At any rate, aesthetics begins with Plato and Aristotle. However, Heidegger’s deconstruction shows that those philosophers only prepare the rule of aesthetics from afar. To be sure, it is a fact that they coined the “basic concepts which would then in the future delimit the horizon for all questioning about art,”<sup>33</sup> such as the pair *hylē-morphē* and the distinction

*technē-physis*. After Plato and Aristotle, those distinctions had undoubtedly to play a decisive role in the philosophical approach to the work of art called aesthetics. But the deconstruction here shows that in Plato and Aristotle the sources from which those distinctions are drawn are in no way primarily artistic, let alone aesthetical. In Plato, and later on in Aristotle, the distinction between matter and form simply refers to beings as such. All beings are apprehended *qua* beings with regard to their outlook, that is, their *eidos*, and in what their outlook offers to our sight, there is always a distinction between outer and inner limits. What is limiting is form, what is limited is matter. Consequently, the return to the sources from which the conceptual pair is drawn is sufficient to generate “a deep and abiding doubt concerning the relevance [*Griffvermögen*] of these concepts when it comes to discussions about art and works of art.”<sup>34</sup> Likewise, we now believe that *technē* means primarily manufacturing or handicraft or technical skill; and consequently we take for granted that the Greeks called the artist a *technites* because they conceived of the artist as a handworker like any craftsman. Accordingly, when it comes to the couple *technē-physis* we tend to believe that it simply means a contrast between the artificial and the natural. Thereby we miss once again the original sources which were strictly ontological. Indeed, *physis* meant beings themselves as a whole considered in its spontaneous appearing and withdrawal, whereas *technē* meant the knowledge on the basis of which the human *Dasein* proceeds and establishes itself in the midst of *physis*, and thereby becomes able to let new beings emerge and to bring them forth.

The third basic fact again is a development which does not have its source in the realm of art, although Heidegger insists that it concerns “a change in our entire history.”<sup>35</sup> With that development, which marks the beginning of the modern age, what beings are as a whole gets determined in relation to the standpoint of man and to his self-knowledge, that is, in relation to the *cogito-sum* and to the *cogito me cogitare*. This implies, broadly speaking, that the human “‘taste’ becomes the court of judicature over beings.”<sup>36</sup> And accordingly, “the meditation on the beautiful in art slips markedly, even exclusively, into the relationship [...] to *aisthesis*,” taken as a specific *cogitatio*.<sup>37</sup> So the foundation of aesthetics is properly modern. At this juncture in his deconstruction, Heidegger does not hesitate to reappropriate Hegel’s conception of modern art, as compared to Greek art. Hegel claims that in modernity, “great art” is over. Heidegger agrees and insists that, in a strict parallelism with the conscious and deliberate rule of aesthetics, we can observe the “decline” of “great art” in the modern age, that is, an art which, like Greek art, corresponds to what Hegel calls “an absolute need,”

or, in Heidegger's own words, an art which "is necessary as an itinerary and sojourn for man in which the truth of beings as a whole, i.e., the unconditioned, the absolute, opens itself up to him."<sup>38</sup>

From this results the fourth basic fact: the aesthetic achievement of Hegel who "recognizes and gives utterance to the end of great art as such."<sup>39</sup>

The next basic fact, the fifth one, is Wagner's attempt to react against "the decline of art from its essence" by projecting a "total artwork,"<sup>40</sup> in which all the fine arts are conjoined and in which the community of a people celebrates itself religiously. Heidegger does not hesitate to claim that such an effort remains "essential," since thereby, "art is once again to become an absolute need."<sup>41</sup> However, the paradox of Wagner's effort, according to Heidegger, is that "in its results and influence it became the very opposite of great art":<sup>42</sup> delirium of the senses, triumph of lived experiences, hypnotism, "total dissolution into sheer feeling, a hovering that gradually sinks into nothingness"<sup>43</sup> — in short the very façade of nihilism. It is remarkable that here Heidegger once again betrays a striking connivance with Nietzsche who, on the one hand, acknowledged that he learned much from Wagner, but, on the other hand, more and more decisively blamed him for having sought a wild upsurge of the Dionysian in full contempt of form, measure and style, and also for having declined into an hypocritical and moralizing Christianity.

As a result of all this historical process, the last basic fact is, of course, associated with the name Friedrich Nietzsche, who "is the first to recognize and proclaim with full clarity" the occurrence of nihilism, that is, of "the lack of creative force and cohesion in grounding man's historical existence upon beings as a whole."<sup>44</sup> Along with such recognition, he also proclaimed that art is historically "the counter-movement" to nihilism.

At this juncture, Heidegger's strategy of connivance with Nietzsche is given a new impetus, by confronting the paradox at stake in the last basic fact. The paradox is that Nietzsche conceived his antinihilistic meditation of art in terms of a physiology of art. Isn't it contradictory to conceive antinihilistic art as an object of physiology? If art is merely an object of physiology, it ought to be "declared the upper apotheosis of nihilism — and not at all the countermovement to it."<sup>45</sup> On this point, Heidegger's explicit intention is to dissipate this seeming contradiction, that is, "to grasp Nietzsche's conception of art in a unified way, which is to say, to conjoin in thought things that at first blush seem to run in wholly contradictory ways."<sup>46</sup> In other words, his purpose is to show that what seems to be the culmination of aesthetics is in fact its reversal. More precisely, the aim is to show that, because of the reversal, Nietzsche marks the point where the

historical process described in six points returns to its beginning. To demonstrate that Nietzsche is looping the loop of that process, and is therefore the most Greek of the Germans, preceded only by Hölderlin. This means that Nietzsche would be the one who gives us now the possibility to articulate the fundamentals of the “cognitive-conceptual thought” truly corresponding to the “great art” of Greece, and which was lacking at the time of the great art, but only because that art itself — considered in its highest achievement, i.e., tragedy — was expressing it, in its own poetic manner, as Heidegger had tried to show in the same year, 1936, in his lecture course on the *Introduction to Metaphysics*. By the same token, he would also be in a position — along with Hölderlin on whom Heidegger had lectured one year before in crypto-Nietzschean terms — to help the Germans to be ready for a new, properly German, original re-foundation of “great art” in this century.

All this makes up the fabric of Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s physiology of art in terms of an ontological selfovercoming of aesthetics. The key notion on which his interpretation is focused is the notion of *Rausch* (intoxication) already introduced in the first section of *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to characterize the Dionysian, and extensively dealt with once again in the late fragments collected in *The Will to Power*.

Allow me to point out a few significant features of Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of the notion.

Let me note first that as soon as he mentions the Dionysian and the Apollinian and the role of their antagonism in Nietzsche’s first book, Heidegger insists that Hölderlin “had seen and conceived of the opposition in an even more profound and lofty manner” than Nietzsche, when in a letter to Böhlendorf he had contrasted “the holy pathos’ and the ‘Occidental Junonian sobriety of representational skill’ in the essence of the Greeks.”<sup>47</sup> To which Heidegger adds the following precision: “By recognizing this antagonism Hölderlin and Nietzsche early on placed a question mark on the task of the German people to find its essence historically.”<sup>48</sup>

A second significant feature of Heidegger’s interpretation of *Rausch* is the emphasis put once again on a profound connivance between Nietzsche’s descriptions and fundamental ontology itself, envisaged in its effort to overcome psychologism and therefore aestheticism. This is conspicuous in Heidegger’s attempt to define what he calls “the universal essence of *Rausch*.” He starts by stressing that intoxication in Nietzsche’s sense is at one a corporal state and a feeling. Then he carefully insists — in a thoroughly phenomenological style — that the corporal state involved in *Rausch* is in no

way a process occurring in a fragment of extension, i.e., in a body such as those approached by modern scientists — either physicists or biologists — in terms of matter and motion. It is rather a state affecting a *Leib*, an animate body inherent to a Self, a body that each is, instead of merely having it like a possession, and which therefore feels itself. Accordingly the feeling involved in *Rausch* is not at all an epiphenomenon of a physical motion as it is the case in all versions of the psycho-physiological parallelism. Rather the feeling at stake “achieves from the outset the inherent internalizing tendency of the body in our *Dasein*.”<sup>49</sup> Once again Nietzsche’s views, despite their psycho-physiological clothing, turn out to be ontological, which is to say that they can be reappropriated in the ontology of *Dasein*. It is as though the nucleus of those views was exactly what expressed the description of disposition, attunement and mood, in the analytic of *Dasein*. This is why Heidegger says: “*Rausch* is a feeling, and it is all the more genuinely a feeling the more essentially a unity of embodying attunement prevails.”<sup>50</sup> This is why also, in strict continuity with the well-known descriptions, in *Being and Time*, of the tension between transcendence and fallenness, Heidegger stresses that the attunement here involved constantly oscillates between two possibilities: “It lifts man out beyond himself or it allows him to be enmeshed in himself and to grow listless.”<sup>51</sup> The lifting out beyond oneself, or transcendence, is precisely what Heidegger recognizes in the Nietzschean *Rausch* when he claims that the “enhancement of force” stressed by Nietzsche’s analysis of the notion “must be understood as the capacity to extend beyond oneself, as a relation to beings in which beings themselves are experienced as being more fully in being, richer, more perspicuous, more essential.”<sup>52</sup> In all respects, this interpretation thus aims at freeing Nietzsche from all suspicion of physiologism. The rapprochement goes so far that Heidegger even suggests that Nietzsche’s notion of physiology not only has nothing to do with modern physiologism but stands in close attunement with the presocratic understanding of *physis*. This third significant feature of the interpretation transpires with clarity when Heidegger claims that the “natural” in Nietzsche’s sense of the word means what “the Greeks of the great age called *deinon* and *deinotaton*, the frightful.”<sup>53</sup> One remembers that the *deinon* was a keyword in Heidegger’s attempt in *The Introduction to Metaphysics* to display the ontological proximity between the discourse of the presocratic thinkers, called “physiologists,” above all Heraclitus and Parmenides, and, on the other hand, the poetic language of tragedy.

Does this mean that Nietzsche’s emphasis on *Rausch* has nothing to do with modern aesthetics? True, Nietzsche characterizes intoxication as “the

basic aesthetic state,” but at close inspection, it appears, according to Heidegger, that such a state is not at all for Nietzsche trapped within the inner circle of subjective lived experiences. Quite the contrary, it is fully open: it is understood as an openness to what in the appearing of beings deserves veneration, that is, Beauty. This is why Heidegger writes: “*Rausch* as a state of feeling explodes the very subjectivity of the subject. By having a feeling for beauty the subject has already come out of himself; he is no longer subjective, no longer a subject.”<sup>54</sup> But the objectivity of the object is exploded as well: “beauty is not something at hand like an object of sheer representation. As an attuning it thoroughly determines the state of man.”<sup>55</sup> Once again Nietzsche’s views are justified by fundamental ontology and its effort to overcome the modern subject-object correlation.

But there is more than this in Heidegger’s interpretation of *Rausch*. While stressing that for Nietzsche *Rausch* is a “form-engendering force,” Heidegger claims that the Nietzschean notion of form escapes modern aesthetics. What Nietzsche rediscovers when he uses the word “form” is thoroughly Greek and can be traced back to the original and genuine meaning of the Greek *morphē*, that is, “the enclosing limit and boundary, what brings and stations a being into that which it is, so that it stands in itself: its configuration.”<sup>56</sup> Consequently, instead of being aesthetical, the Nietzschean form is fully ontological: “Form as what allows that which we encounter to radiate in appearance, first brings the comportment that it determines into the immediacy of a relation to beings. Form displays the relation itself as the state of original comportment toward beings, the festive state in which the being itself in its essence is celebrated and thus for the first time placed in the open.”<sup>57</sup>

This ontological interpretation of *Rausch* as a form-engendering force sheds by the same token an ontological light on Nietzsche’s conception of art as the uppermost mode of the will to power. This is what shines forth in Heidegger’s analysis of the Nietzschean notion of “grand style.” Allow me to limit myself on this point to a few significant quotations which once again betray a striking connivance. While stressing that art in Nietzsche’s sense can only reach “its proper essence in the grand style,” Heidegger insists that what is at stake in grand style is not a mere eventuality among other possibilities but a “concept of rank,” and that art thus understood in terms of greatness “places the whole of *Dasein* in decision and keeps it there.”<sup>58</sup> This topic — a decision concerning the whole of *Dasein* — is a central issue in both the *Introduction to Metaphysics* and in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, at least in the early versions of the latter. Another striking sign of connivance may be found in Heidegger’s emphasis on the unification of opposites —



chaos and measure; abundance and containment — in the meaning of grand style. This Heraclitean unification was a central topic in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*. As a consequence of such profound agreement with Nietzsche, the interpretation of the notion of grand style turns out to demonstrate a self-overcoming of aesthetics:

Hence such aesthetics, within itself, is led beyond itself. The artistic states are those which place themselves under the supreme command of measure and law, taking themselves beyond themselves in their will to advance. Such states are what they essentially are when, willing out beyond themselves, they are more than they are, and when they assert themselves in such mastery. The artistic states are — and that means art is — nothing else than will to power.<sup>59</sup>

And further on, we find this proclamation which underscores without ambiguity the metaphysical stakes of such self-overcoming of aesthetics: “Precisely because the grand style is a bountiful and affirmative willing toward Being, its essence reveals itself only when a decision is made, indeed by meaning of the grand style itself, about the meaning of the Being of beings.”<sup>60</sup> As soon as we remember that the meaning of the Being of beings is the grounding question of philosophy, Heidegger’s most central question, we may realize that his debate with Nietzsche about art is an intimate debate with himself. I do not claim that he simply projects his own philosophical debate into Nietzsche’s text, but rather that at that moment in his own itinerary Nietzsche provided him an indispensable inspiration. At any rate, the entire interpretation of the will to power as art has its ultimate resort in fundamental ontology itself, that is, in the inquiry about the meaning of Being, an inquiry which in 1936 is no longer focused on the individual *Dasein* but on the *Dasein* of a *Volk* guided by its creators. It is with respect to this enlarged fundamental ontology that Heidegger finds himself in a profound connivance with Nietzsche, and that he claims that his interpretation is nothing more, nothing less than the expression of what he calls “the unsaid” in Nietzsche.<sup>61</sup> The connivance is so strong and intimate that even the deconstructive dimension of fundamental ontology is admirably recognized in Nietzsche by the Heidegger who writes: “Such thinking about art is philosophical thought setting the standards through which historical confrontation comes to be, prefiguring what is to come.”<sup>62</sup>

To be sure, one might perhaps be tempted to object that there is at least one sign of a fundamental disagreement with Nietzsche despite all those signs of connivance. Indeed doesn’t Heidegger side with Kant against Nietzsche when he claims, in section 15, that Nietzsche completely misunderstood Kant’s doctrine of the beautiful? If the objection means that

Heidegger ultimately contests the Nietzschean primacy of the creator and appeals to the reflective judgment in Kant's sense of the word, that is, to the ability everyone has to be a fair judge in matters of beauty by cultivating an "enlarged mentality" or a *sensus communis*, understood as the ability to reflect on one's own judgment by transferring oneself to the standpoint of others (*Critique of Judgment*, par. 40), then, I believe, the objection misses the point. For there is no mention whatsoever of that topic in Heidegger's attempt to demonstrate that Nietzsche misunderstood Kant. What Heidegger claims is simply that Nietzsche, in his interpretation of disinterestedness as a way of suspending the will, was more Schopenhauerian than truly Nietzschean. Moreover by focusing on the Kantian notion of "favor" [*Gunst*], considered as *Freigabe*, what Heidegger wants to suggest is that Kant himself was, in a way, more Nietzschean than people believe, provided that one admits that favor is but another name for the yes-saying dimension of the will to power. In other words, according to Heidegger, for both Kant and Nietzsche the statement "'This is beautiful' is an *affirmation*" (WP 852).<sup>63</sup> But ultimately Heidegger makes it clear that for him Nietzsche goes beyond Kant. Indeed right after recalling Nietzsche's words "In my view what is beautiful ... is an expression of what is most worthy of honor," Heidegger writes the following: "For just this — purely to honor what is of worth in its appearance — is for Kant the essence of the beautiful, although unlike Nietzsche, he did not expand the meaning directly to all historical significance and greatness."<sup>64</sup>

Finally, one might perhaps also object that in spite of all those signs of connivance, there remains a decisive topic in fundamental ontology which cannot be integrated within a Nietzschean perspective. The entire project of fundamental ontology — either restricted to the individual *Dasein* or expanded to the *Dasein* of a people — depends on the primacy of what Plato called the *bios theoretikos*. Even the Rectoral address proclaims that same primacy for it is after all only a remake of Plato's *Republic*. To this objection I would reply that Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche in 1936 does not damage the primacy of the *bios theoretikos* in any way and even deliberately confirms it. This is what becomes obvious when attention is paid to the strategy thanks to which Heidegger carefully protects Plato — i.e., *The Republic* and the *Phaedrus* — from Nietzsche's assault on Platonism. Plato himself turns out to be immune to Nietzsche's reversal of Platonism. Plato himself, in other words, is not Platonism. In Heidegger's interpretation, the Platonism Nietzsche attacks is simply the historical process of decline or of moving away from Plato's genuine thought. Platonism is the historical movement of nihilism which starts with the Christian denigration of the

earthly existence and the interpretation of the supersensuous as a “beyond.” Heidegger insists that in Plato himself, no more than in Nietzsche for that matter, such a split has no place. In both Plato and Nietzsche, because they were creators, the issue was to make truth, in the purest sense of the word — *aletheia* as unconcealment of the Being of beings — shine forth in this world, shine forth here and now in beings as a whole, thanks to creation. This is why, in his effort to penetrate what he takes to be the most intimate thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger writes, in a commentary of the *Twilights of the Idols*: “Nietzsche [...] consciously sets Plato apart from all Platonism, protecting him from it.”<sup>65</sup>

In this regard, Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's page on “How the ‘true world’ finally became an error” is extremely significant of the connivance I am dealing with here. Nietzsche writes about the first phase in that historical process: “1. The true world, attainable for the wise, the pious, the virtuous man — he lives in it, *he is it*.” Without hesitation, Heidegger claims that this statement penetrates the “founding” of Plato's thought. He insists that Nietzsche correctly understood that for Plato “the ‘true world’ is not yet anything ‘Platonic,’ that is, not something unattainable, merely desirable, merely ‘ideal.’”<sup>66</sup> Rather “the essential definition of the true world consists in the fact that it is attainable here and now for man, although not for any and every man, and not without further ado. It is attainable for the virtuous; it is the supersensuous. The implication is that virtue consists in repudiation of the sensuous, since denial of the world that is closest to us, the sensuous world, is proper to the Being of beings.”<sup>67</sup>

In this context, the most striking sign of a deep connivance is provided by Heidegger himself when — in order to justify the Nietzschean statement — he refers to his own essay on *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, Part Two. Plato indeed plays a decisive role in this essay of 1929: the core of the second part of this little book is an interpretation of Plato's notion of the *agathon*, such as it is expressed in *The Republic*. Plato in the dialogue claims that *to agathon* is *epekeina tes ousias*. In Heidegger's interpretation, *to agathon* is a name of Being and Being is that to which *Dasein* is open. Consequently Plato's phrase essentially means not only that Being is beyond beings, but also that “the essence of the *agathon* consists for *Dasein* in being in power [*Mächtigkeit*] of itself as the {*Wor*}*Umwillen*...”<sup>68</sup>

It is exactly in the same terms that the lecture course of 1936-37 interprets the words of Nietzsche about Plato's notion of the true world as attainable here for the virtuous who *is it*. When Nietzsche says: “(Oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, convincing. Circumlocution for

the sentence 'I, Plato, *am* the truth')," Heidegger comments without hesitation in the language of his own fundamental ontology. He writes: "The thought of the Ideas and the interpretation of Being posited here are creative in and of themselves. Plato's work is not yet Platonism. The 'true world' is not yet the object of a doctrine; it is the power of *Dasein*; it is what lights up in becoming present; it is pure radiance without cover."<sup>69</sup>

The reference to *Vom Wesen des Grundes* in the first lecture course on Nietzsche clearly indicates retrospectively that Heidegger in fundamental ontology, that is, in all the writings gravitating around *Being and Time*, was interpreting and reappropriating Plato in the light of Nietzsche. It suggests by the same token that the well known tension insisted upon in all those writings, that is, the polarity between everydayness and authenticity, as well as the peculiar description of authenticity in terms of *Mächtigkeit*, *Macht*, *Worumwillen*, were inspired simultaneously by Plato's parable of the cave and by Nietzsche's appeal to the overman in order to escape the blind and happy nihilism of the last man.

### Acknowledgments

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### Endnotes

1. Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. T. Kisiel, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985) p. 80. [*Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*. *Gesamtausgabe* 20, ed. P. Jaeger, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1979). Volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* subsequently cited as GA.]
2. *Ibid.*
3. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. MacQuarrie & E. Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 308. [*Sein und Zeit*, (Tübingen; Niemeyer, 1979), p. 264. Henceforth: SZ.]
4. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 448; SZ, 396.
5. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, GA 34.
6. GA 34, pp. 60, 61.
7. GA 34, p. 64.
8. GA 34, p. 64.
9. Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volume One: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. D.F. Krell, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 4-5. [Hereafter, N1.] [*Nietzsche I*, (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), p. 13. Henceforth: NI.]
10. Heidegger, N1, 5; NI, 14.
11. N1, 20; NI, 28.
12. Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, GA 32, p. 45.
13. N1, 40; NI, 50.

14. N1, 40-41; NI, 50.
15. N1, 41; NI, 51.
16. *Ibid.*
17. N1, 48; NI, 59.
18. N1, 51; NI, 62.
19. N1, 56; NI, 68-69.
20. NI, 61, NI, 72-73.
21. N1, 61; NI, 73.
22. N1, 64-65; NI, 77.
23. N1, 68; NI, 80.
24. N1, *vide* section 12.
25. N1, 70; NI, 83.
26. N1, 74 (italics mine); NI, 89.
27. N1, 77; NI, 91.
28. N1, 79; NI, 94.
29. N1, 78-79; NI, 94-95.
30. Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), p. 23; *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975).
31. N1, 79; NI, 94.
32. N1, 80; NI, 95.
33. N1, 80, translation modified; NI, 95.
34. N1, 82-83; NI, 98.
35. N1, 83; NI, 98-99.
36. N1, 83; NI, 99.
37. *Ibid.*
38. N1, 84; NI, 100.
39. *Ibid.*
40. N1, 85, translation modified; NI, 101.
41. N1, 87; NI, 104.
42. *Ibid.*
43. N1, 86; NI, 103.
44. N1, 90; NI, 108.
45. N1, 93; NI, 111.
46. N1, 92; NI, 110.
47. N1, 103-104; NI, 124.
48. N1, 104; NI, 124.
49. N1, 99; NI, 118.
50. N1, 100; NI, 119-120.
51. N1, 99; NI, 119.
52. N1, 100; NI, 120.
53. N1, 128; NI, 151.
54. N1, 123; NI, 145.
55. *Ibid.*
56. N1, 119; NI, 139.
57. N1, 119; NI, 140.
58. N1, 125; NI, 147-148.
59. N1, 129-130; NI, 152.
60. N1, 134; NI, 158.

61. *Ibid.*

62. N1, 130; NI, 153.

63. N1, 112; NI, 132.

64. N1, 111; NI, 131.

65. N1, 205; NI, 237.

66. N1, 204; NI, 235.

67. N1, 203-204; NI, 235.

68. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983),  
p. 41.

69. N1, 204; NI, 236.